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ABSTRACT

A preliminary evaluation and report were conducted of the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Schools' (MPS) Parental Choice Program (PCP) following its first year of operation. The state legislated program provides an opportunity for students meeting specific criteria to attend private, non-sectarian schools in Milwaukee. A payment from public funds equivalent to the MPS per-member state aid (approximately $2,500 in 1990) is paid to the private schools in lieu of tuition for the student. The evaluation provided an analysis of the families and students who participated in the PCP, a description and an analysis of the schools in the program, a preliminary analysis of program outcomes, and recommendations to amend the statute and administrative rules. Some of the evaluation's findings in those areas are the following: (1) the program appeared to satisfy the intent of offering low-income families a choice other than the public schools for their children's education; (2) of the 7 private schools which enrolled 341 students, one closed in the middle of the school year due to severe difficulties; (3) preliminary outcomes after the first year were mixed and showed that achievement test scores did not register dramatic gains while student attendance, parental attitudes, and parental involvement were all positive; and (4) 5 recommendations were offered to improve information available to parents and accountability by parents. Included are 20 tables and 3 appendixes with achievement test score measures and 10 tables. (JB)

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FIRST YEAR REPORT
MILWAUKEE PARENTAL CHOICE PROGRAM

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and
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University of Wisconsin-Madison

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a *preliminary* report on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, enacted by the Wisconsin legislature in spring 1990, provides an opportunity for students meeting specific criteria to attend private, nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee. A payment from public funds equivalent to the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) per-member state aid (approximately $2,500 in 1990) is paid to the private schools in lieu of tuition for the student. Students must come from families with incomes not exceeding 1.75 times the national poverty line. Choice students must not have been in private schools in the prior year or in public schools in districts other than MPS. The total number of Choice students in any year was limited to one percent of the MPS enrollment (approximately 980 in 1990). Schools must limit Choice students to 49 percent of their total enrollment. They must also admit Choice students without discriminating. Both the statute and administrative rules specify that pupils must be "accepted on a random basis." This was interpreted to mean that if a school was oversubscribed, random selection was required. A court ruling in August 1990 found that the private schools did not need to comply with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

The report is divided into four sections: (1) an analysis of the families and students who participated in the Choice Program in 1990-91; (2) a description and analysis of the schools in the program; (3) a very preliminary analysis of outcomes of the program; and (4) recommendations to amend the statute and administrative rules.

Because of the short time the program was in operation, and because of the small number of students participating, the report is preliminary. *The basic conclusion of the report is a recommendation to continue the program for at least several more years. Expansion is not currently needed or recommended. We also recommend that future evaluations include monitoring the areas of concern expressed in this report.*

Choice Families and Students. The program appeared to satisfy the intent of offering low-income families a choice other than the public schools for their children's education. Results of the evaluation revealed the following about the participating students and their families:

- Prior test scores and parent responses to survey questions about prior schooling indicated that the students were not succeeding in the Milwaukee Public Schools and probably had higher than average behavioral problems.

- Of the participating families, 59 percent were receiving public assistance.

- Seventy-six percent of those participating were single-parent families.

- Participating parents were, on average, more active in the schools than MPS parents, somewhat more educated, and expressed more alienation from the schools.

- Parents were seeking a better learning environment with a better disciplinary climate.

Rather than skimming off the best students, this program seems to provide an alternative educational environment for students who are not doing particularly well in the public school system.

The Choice Schools. In the summer of 1990, ten private schools expressed interest and were certified by the Department of Public Instruction to enroll students in the Choice Program. Seven schools enrolled 341 students, with the majority of the students (317) enrolled in five prekindergarten-to-8 schools. There was clearly variation in quality among the Choice schools in the program. One of the original schools, Juanita Virgil Academy, had severe difficulties and was closed in the middle of the year. Thus merely being a private school does not necessarily insure an adequate educational environment. The remaining schools in the program did not exhibit the severe problems of Juanita Virgil.

The most serious institutional problems were high staff turnover due to low pay, and dealing with recent changes in location and affiliation for several of the schools. The schools also had difficulty hiring minority teachers.

In general, the schools have elaborate and refined organizational structures that involve parents heavily. Parental involvement, which was already high for Choice parents in their prior schools, generally increased in the private schools, especially in the areas of volunteering and fund-raising.

Classes that we observed were generally small, with a high proportion of student time spent on task. The curricula in the schools were relatively rich in terms of art, music and dance, languages, and computer use. Most of the instruction we observed was very similar in substance and style to instruction in public schools. The schools are not well equipped to meet the exceptional needs of learning disabled and emotionally disturbed students. In summary, there were problems in the Choice schools, but on balance, the schools provided adequate education.

Preliminary Outcomes. Preliminary outcomes after the first year of the Choice Program were mixed. Achievement test scores did not register dramatic gains and the Choice students remained approximately equal to low-income students in MPS (higher on reading, slightly lower on math). Based on individual changes in national percentile rankings, approximately as many Choice students gained as declined. All these results are based on a small number of students.

Student attendance, parental attitudes toward Choice schools, opinions of the Choice Program, and parental involvement were all positive. Attendance was slightly higher than the average elementary school attendance in MPS. Parental

attitudes toward their schools and education of their children were much more positive than their evaluations of their prior public schools. This shift occurred in every category (teachers, principals, instruction, discipline, etc.). When parents of students who did not finish the year in a Choice school were included, the results were similar, although not as pronounced. Similarly, parental involvement, which was more frequent than for the average MPS parent in prior schools, was even greater for most activities in the private schools.

Attrition during the first year appeared to be high. During the school year, most students leaving the program were from Juanita Virgil Academy, which closed in February 1991. The educational experience of Juanita Virgil students was undoubtedly negative. But a considerable number of students who completed the school year in the Choice schools did not re-enroll in Choice schools in September 1991. Of the 249 students in Choice schools in June, 86 did not return in September. Forty of those students enrolled in MPS. Our report expresses uncertainty as to why. It is possible that problems in the schools, especially only modest achievement gains, could have been a factor. That, however, is at odds with survey results that indicate parent satisfaction with child learning. This attrition may reflect the uncertainty of the program's future due to legal challenges.

Recommended Changes in the Statute and Administrative Rules. To improve information available to and accountability by parents, we recommend the following program changes:

Governance. Schools in the Choice Program should be required to have a formal governance structure, including a board of directors, suitable committees, and bylaws. They must also adhere to state open meetings laws.

Financial Reporting. Schools should also be required to conduct an annual financial audit which meets the accounting standards for private, nonprofit organizations. The report should be public and filed annually with the Department of Public Instruction.

Added Accountability. Schools should be required to meet all current and future state outcome requirements, including statewide tests, dropout reporting, and a school report card when it is required.

Review Accountability Standards. We recommend that the legislature review the current standards of accountability as specified in the statute. At present, schools may meet any one of four standards (attendance, achievement, grade advancement, or parental involvement). We suggest that the schools meet more than one of these standards. We would also suggest flexibility in the standards based on the level of the school.

Program Information. To facilitate parent knowledge of the program and the Choice schools, we suggest the legislature consider making information on the Choice Program available through the extensive school selection process in MPS.

Changes in either statutes or administrative rules are also recommended to facilitate easier enrollment for parents and Choice schools. These could include an early enrollment period and summer school programs. Transportation problems and the issue of reimbursement also need to be addressed.

Finally, we recommend that the legislature consider problems of incorporating learning disabled students in the program, second semester enrollment of Choice students, and a study of administrative costs of the program borne by the Choice schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is being submitted to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) which has statutory responsibility to evaluate the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. DPI appointed the author as an independent evaluator of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in September 1990. The author gratefully acknowledges the opportunity to evaluate this new program.

The research was funded by a start-up grant from the Robert La Follette Institute of Public Affairs, and by a substantial and continuing grant from the Spencer Foundation in Chicago. The funding covered all expenses, including all student wages, project assistantships, and partial release time for the author. No consulting fees have been paid. Without the support of the Spencer Foundation as well as the administrative support of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, this research would not have been possible.

Numerous people aided in the research. Most important are the members of the research team. With one exception, all are or were students, both graduates and undergraduates at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Some worked for brief periods, others have been with the project for most of the time. Only Mark Rigdon has been with this project from the beginning. His contributions as leader of the research team have been too numerous to list. Other past or present members of the team include: Andrea Bailey, Nadine Goff, Chris Kennedy, Brian Kroger, Zina Lawrence, Steve Little, Tamara Louzecky, Lori Mauer, Larissa Ripley, and Julie White. Stephanie Fassnacht and Chris Thorn provided computer programming support. Alice Honeywell supplied much needed editing.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This is a *preliminary* report on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The report is preliminary for three reasons. First, the program was modest, carefully targeted to a very small number of students and schools. Second, the program has been under a legal cloud since its inception. Legal challenges began in the summer of 1990 and continue as this report is prepared. Uncertainty about the program's future undoubtedly affects decisions by parents and schools to participate and continue in the program. Third, one year is an inadequate period of time to evaluate educational outcomes in this or any other program. That problem is compounded by the limited sample sizes and uncertainty about the future.

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, enacted in spring 1990, provides an opportunity for students meeting specific criteria to attend private, nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee. A payment from public funds equivalent to the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) per-member state aid (approximately $2,500 in 1990) is paid to the private schools in lieu of tuition for the student. Students must come from families with incomes not exceeding 1.75 times the national poverty line. Choice students must not have been in private schools in the prior year or in public schools in districts other than MPS. The total number of Choice students in any year was limited to one percent of the MPS enrollment (approximately 980 students in 1990).

Schools must limit Choice students to 49 percent of their total enrollment. They must also admit Choice students without discriminating (as specified in s. 118.13, Stats.). A court ruling in August 1990 found that the private schools did not need to comply with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Both the statute and administrative rules specify that pupils must be "accepted on a random basis." This was interpreted to mean that if a school was oversubscribed, random selection was required. Administrative clarifications in the first year limited random selection to grades which were oversubscribed. In addition, in situations in which one child from a family was admitted to the program, a sibling was automatically allowed to enroll even if random selection was required in that child's grade.

The program was designed to prevent public subsidies to nonpoor families, students attending religious schools, and students already attending private schools. It was also structured to limit the selection criteria of the private schools. This program and the results outlined in this report cannot be generalized to the more unconstrained "voucher" programs–those that would subsidize private school education in much broader circumstances. The spirit and the letter of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program are a stark contrast to public subsidy of elite or exclusive private education. Rather the intent is to provide alternative educational opportunities for families that cannot easily exercise choice by changing residence or purchasing private education.

The study on which this report is based employs a number of methodological approaches. Surveys were mailed in the fall of 1990 to all parents who applied and were accepted for enrollment in one of the private Choice schools. Similar surveys were sent in May and June 1991 to a random sample of 5,438 MPS parents. The surveys were designed to assess parent knowledge of and evaluation of the Choice Program, attitudes toward their children's educational experiences in their prior public schools, and the extent of their parental involvement in MPS schools.

A second, follow-up survey of Choice parents assessing attitudes relating to their year in private schools was mailed in June 1991.[1] Surveys have recently been sent to 407 Choice parents whose children enrolled in the second year of the program for the first time. An additional 75 surveys were sent to continuing first-year parents who failed to respond to last year's survey. The results of that survey are not included in this report.

Detailed case studies were completed in April 1991 in the four private schools that enrolled the majority of the choice students. These case studies involved approximately 30 person-days in the schools, 56 hours of classroom observation, and interviews with nearly all of the teachers and administrators in the schools. Questionnaires were completed by 341 students in the fourth through eighth grades.[2] Researchers also attended and observed parent and community group meetings, and board of director meetings for several schools.

The research also included analysis of first-year outcome measures, including data on achievement test scores, attendance, and attrition from the program. Prior MPS test data were available for approximately half of the 347 students who began the Choice Program in the fall of 1990.

In accordance with normal research protocol, and in agreement with the private schools, reported results are aggregated and schools are not individually identified in order to ensure confidentiality. Thus these findings should not be construed as an audit or an assessment of the effectiveness of the educational environment in any specific school.

This report is divided into four sections: (1) an analysis of the families and students who participated in the Choice Program in 1990-91; (2) a description and analysis of the schools in the program; (3) a very preliminary analysis of outcomes of the program; and (4) a set of recommendations that the legislature might consider in amending the existing law or in the event that they are required to reenact the program as a result of the pending Wisconsin Supreme Court decision.

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[1]Response rates are indicated in Appendix Table A1. Although the response rate for the MPS control group is low compared with national mail surveys, it is high relative to MPS surveys (on which surveyors get approximately a 20 percent return rate). Differences of means compared with the system as a whole indicate no statistical differences for our group on race or qualifications for free lunch.

[2]Third graders were given questionnaires in one of the schools that employed third and fourth grade combined classes.

The *bottom line* of this report is a recommendation to continue the program for at least several more years. Despite some problems and difficulties, engendered both by the uncertainty of the program's future (because of court challenges) and by limited demonstrated educational success to date, it is clear this program continues to offer opportunities otherwise unavailable to some Milwaukee parents. We also recommend that future evaluations monitor areas of concern expressed in the report.

This program is not now, nor probably will it ever be, *the* answer for the extensive and complex problems associated with providing a quality education for Milwaukee children. It is equally difficult to believe, as some opponents have argued, that given the current size and limitations of the program, it poses a serious threat to the public school system. It offers the seeds of innovation, opportunities for poor parents that are already available to most other parents in our state, and marginal support for nonsectarian private schools, schools that for a number of years have been working to provide education under some of the most adverse conditions.

II. CHOICE FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

The first year of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program provides limited and inconclusive evidence on the demand, popularity, and ability of parents to take advantage of the program. On May 30, 1990, following enactment of the program as part of the Wisconsin budget in the spring of 1990, a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the statute (s. 119.23) was filed in Dane County Circuit Court. Because of the suit, throughout the enrollment period in the late spring and summer, there was great uncertainty about whether students would be allowed to attend certified private schools in the fall. An affirmative ruling by the court on August 6, 1990 allowed students to begin classes. The uncertainty continued as that ruling was appealed and then overturned by the appeals court in November 1990. That ruling was appealed to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments on October 5, 1991. At this writing, the Supreme Court has not yet decided the case.

Enrollment. Enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in September 1990 was 341. Another 217 students were refused admission because of space limitations in the schools. Of the students enrolled, 74 percent were African-Americans, 19 percent Hispanic, six percent white, and one percent other minority or unknown.

Enrollment in September 1991 was up to 562. One hundred thirty-three applied but were not accepted by the schools. The 1991 enrollment is 73 percent African-American, 23 percent Hispanic, four percent white.

Four schools--Bruce-Guadalupe Bilingual Community School, Harambee Community School, Urban Day School, and Woodlands School--accounted for 253 of the 341 choice students enrolled in September 1990, and they account for 521 of the 562 students enrolled in September 1991. Juanita Virgil Academy, which no longer exists, had 63 choice students in 1990. SER-Jobs for Progress, an alternative school

and job training facility for high school students who are considerably behind in credits, enrolled 24 students in September 1990, and 37 students in September 1991. The other school involved in the program, Lakeshore Montessori School, enrolled two students in 1990 and four in 1991.

Enrolling in the Choice Program. Table 1 indicates the primary reasons people gave for enrolling in the Choice Program in 1990. The single most important factor was educational quality, followed closely by the disciplinary and general atmosphere in the chosen private school. Location and having siblings in the school were less important factors.

In the first year, the Choice Program was hastily advertised in community newspapers, radio and television advertisements, community centers, and churches. In response to a survey question asking how parents heard about the program, however, the largest number of parents (52 percent) indicated that they learned of the program from friends or relatives. Thirty-six percent said they heard about it on television and another 33 percent from newspapers. Information obtained from the schools themselves, churches, or community centers were mentioned by only 18, 5, and 3 percent, respectively.

As indicated in Table 2, parents were generally satisfied with the amount and accuracy of information about the program. They were less pleased with the information about the schools, despite the fact that they were generally pleased with the assistance they received from the schools. There was greater dissatisfaction with the assistance parents received from the Department of Public Instruction, although the majority was still satisfied or very satisfied. Of more concern are the results from our random sample of MPS parents who are not enrolled and did not apply for the Choice Program. When we asked if they had heard of the Choice Program, only 51 percent (779 of 1537) said they had heard of it in June 1991--one year and numerous news stories after it was enacted. Although applications were up in the second year, and in both years exceeded the slots available in participating schools, the program is still not well known among Milwaukee parents. Recommendations for improving the enrollment process and increasing parent knowledge of the programs are included in Section V of this report.

Family Demographics

Income, Employment, and Family Status. The Choice Program is targeted to low-income families and survey results confirm that Choice families are less well-off financially than the average MPS family. In terms of family income, 78 percent earned less than $15,000 in 1989 and only 7 percent earned more than $25,000 (see Table 3). For the 1513 respondents who answered this question in our MPS control group, 47 percent were below $15,000 per year and 35 percent were above $25,000.

MPS families that qualify for free or reduced lunch were very close in income to Choice families, with 71 percent below $15,000 and only 10 percent above $25,000.[3]

Employment and public assistance status are depicted in Table 4 and are consistent with the income data. Although 66 percent of the Choice mothers indicated full or part-time employment, 57 percent were receiving AFDC or general assistance. Less is known about the fathers, although their participation in the labor market was higher. MPS parents were more likely to be employed and had a much lower rate of receiving assistance. The low-income group was very close to the Choice parents in the likelihood of being on assistance (59 percent). In terms of family status, 76 percent of the Choice respondents were not married. This compares to 49 percent not presently married for the full MPS sample and 64 percent not married for the low-income group.

Education. To the degree our small sample size is indicative, there was a distinct difference between Choice and MPS parents, particularly mothers, in terms of education. As Table 5 shows, only 24 percent of the Choice mothers did not receive a high-school diploma as compared to 33 percent of the MPS parents and 46 percent of the low-income parents. The same pattern is true for female parents or guardians receiving some college training. Among mothers and female guardians, 55 percent of Choice women, 40 percent of MPS, and 30 percent of low-income MPS women had at least some college. Fathers or male guardians of Choice students are not as well educated as mothers, and are very close to the average male education in MPS as a whole (33 percent less than high school, 42 percent some college).[4]

Age. There is less difference among parents in terms of age. As shown in Table 6, only 9 percent of Choice mothers are younger than 26 and only 33 percent younger than 31. That makes them slightly younger than MPS parents--5 percent are under 26 and 26 percent are below 31. The average ages indicate that both mothers and fathers in Choice families are slightly younger than in MPS as a whole.

Summary. Choice families appear to be considerably less well off than the average MPS family in terms of employment, income, and being on public assistance or AFDC. They are also less likely to come from two-parent families. As a group,

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[3]The income match between the Choice Program and free or reduced lunch is fairly close. The Choice Program has a limit of 1.75 times the poverty line. Qualification for free lunch is 1.35 times the poverty line and reduced-free lunch 1.85 times the poverty line. Throughout the report, when it is appropriate and there are substantial deviations between the total MPS parent sample and low-income parents, we will include data on the low-income group.

[4]Although, as in all surveys, there is probably some exaggeration in reported education, we have to assume that inflated reports would be characteristic of all groups, and thus the differences remain.

Choice parents share more characteristics with low-income parents in MPS than with the population as a whole. This is what the program intended. The exception appears to be education. For both mothers and fathers, but more so for mothers, Choice parents were more likely to have graduated from high school and received some college training than the average MPS parent.

Experience of Choice Parents in Prior Schools

Parent Satisfaction With Public Schools. There is considerable evidence that parents enrolling in the Choice Program were not fully satisfied with their prior schools in MPS. There is also evidence, based on achievement test results, that the students were, on average, not doing well in these schools. Parent satisfaction levels for those families whose children attended MPS in prior years is portrayed in Table 7. The list is ordered from most to least satisfied based on the addition of the first two columns ("very satisfied" and "satisfied"). What is distinctive is that the factors with which parents are most satisfied have little to do with the operation or outcome of the school (textbooks, school location, etc.). They expressed least satisfaction with what their child learned and the degree of discipline in the prior MPS school. These latter issues were at the top of the list for why parents said they enrolled in the Choice Program (Table 1).

Again there is a sharp contrast between Choice and average MPS parents. In every category, *Choice parents were less satisfied than the average MPS parent with public schools.* The magnitude of differences in satisfaction between MPS and Choice parents was greater in those areas where Choice parents were least satisfied. Thus while only 12 percent fewer Choice parents are satisfied with textbooks than the average MPS parent, 32 percent more Choice parents are dissatisfied with "the amount their child learned" and 26 percent are more dissatisfied than MPS parents with discipline.

This dissatisfaction carries over into a very simple, but widely used measure which asks parents to grade schools on an A to F scale. The results are depicted in Table 8.[5] Choice parents graded their child's prior public school much more harshly than did all MPS parents or low-income MPS parents. Only 32 percent of the Choice parents graded their schools as an A or B. In contrast, and providing a somewhat different perception of MPS than is usually portrayed, 66 percent of the MPS parents and 65 percent of the MPS low-income parents gave an A or B rating to their child's school. The average grade parents give their schools (2.1 for Choice parents, 2.9 for MPS parents, and 2.8 for MPS low-income parents) reflects these different perceptions.

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[5]In this and several subsequent tables, measures for Choice parents based on their experience in 1990-1991 in the private schools is included in the table. Those results will be discussed in Section III and Section IV of this report.

Prior Parental Involvement. In the year prior to enrollment in private schools, Choice parents, while less happy with MPS, nevertheless were somewhat more active in the schools than the average MPS parent. Table 9 compares how often *the schools contacted parents* about their children or about participation in school activities. Choice parents report more frequent contacts in every area, although the differences are not striking.

The differences are somewhat larger when *parents contacted the school* (see Table 10). Consistent with past findings, the areas in which Choice parents were more likely than the average MPS parent to contact the school were issues related to their child's academic performance and their child's behavior. For example, 61 percent of the Choice parents reported contacting the school three or more times during the year concerning academic performance. This compares to 44 percent for MPS parents. On behavior, 50 percent of the Choice parents indicated three or more contacts, compared with 33 percent for the MPS parents.

Choice parents also reported somewhat higher activity in organized activities such as parent-teacher conferences and parent-teacher organizations and their associated activities (see Table 11). The largest differences appear to be in attending and taking part in parent/teacher organizations and activities.

Choice parents also were considerably more likely to engage in educational activities with their children at home than were MPS parents. The differences are most telling in reading, working on math, and writing. As Table 12 indicates, approximately 20 percent more Choice parents than MPS parents were likely to work with their children three or more times a week on these activities. Very few (6-9 percent) Choice parents report never working with their children in an average week on reading, math, or writing.

The Importance of Education

Although education is generally perceived as important in the United States, it is very difficult to assess the importance of education in any one family. We attempted to measure the commitment to education relative to other important family goals. The results, comparing MPS parents with Choice parents are depicted in Table 13. All parents reply that they value education as much or more than they value jobs, money, religion, family ethnic tradition, or "having a good home." The only discrepancy between the two groups is the importance of education in relation to maintaining religious faith. Only 22 percent of Choice parents think education is more important than maintaining religion, whereas 33 percent of MPS families think so.

Educational expectations are difficult to measure. Predictably, the parents surveyed expressed high expectations for their children's future education. Eighty-four percent of the Choice parents, 76 percent of the MPS parents, and 72 percent of the low-income MPS parents expect their children to have college or post-graduate education.

Prior Student Achievement

One of the major arguments against choice programs, whether public or private school choice, is that they will enroll the best students, leaving the remaining to be educated in the public school system. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was designed specifically to prevent that from happening. Students were to come from poor families, schools were to select students randomly, and students were not to have been in private schools in the prior year. If our small samples are correct, Choice parents are clearly not well-off financially, or in terms of employment, and most students are from single-parent families. The parents are also relatively unhappy with their prior schools. The unhappiness was most pronounced in terms of their child's learning and behavioral problems or the lack of discipline of their children. The remaining question is how well they were actually achieving.

Almost all of the students in this program are elementary or middle-school students. It is extremely difficult to measure outcomes or achievement for children at those ages. Grades are rarely given or have little meaning, attendance generally varies little, suspensions are very seldom given at the elementary level, and (as is true of high school) vary from school to school depending on administrative rules and the philosophy of principals. In short, it is hard to measure achievement in the early years.

The only prior-achievement measures available for this study are standardized tests that were taken while students were in the Milwaukee Public School system. Standardized achievement tests are designed to compare students on basic subjects. The comparisons are all relative to a national sample of students at the same grade levels. The tests are multiple choice and require students to read the questions (at all but the lowest grade levels in which the teacher orally presents the questions). Because students must read the questions, reading skills become important, and thus students with poor English reading skills may also do worse on math and on other tests. On the other hand, standardized achievement scores do provide a specific and concise quantitative measure of how one set of students is doing relative to other students and to a national sample.

Because students entered the Choice program in any grade, prior tests covered a number of years. Two measures are possible. The first, displayed in Table 14, is based on the *last achievement test* the student took before enrolling in the Choice Program (80 percent of the prior tests were in May 1990). The second, portrayed in Appendix B (Table B1), is based on *all prior* tests in the student's file. Conceptually, the latter measure captures the average learning over the students' prior years in MPS. The last test is a better measure of where students were when they entered the private school.

The results add evidence to the conclusion that the Choice students were not achieving well in MPS. The first row in the Table 14 indicates the percentage of students at or above the 50th national percentile. The second row gives the median national percentile for each group. The third and fourth rows report the mean and standard deviation of the normal curve equivalent, which is a score based on a

distribution that has a normal curve shape. The normal curve for the reference population has a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 21.06.[6]

It is apparent that for the Choice students on which we have prior test data, achievement was very low prior to their enrolling in the private schools in 1990. On the last test they took in MPS, only 25 percent were at or above the median in reading and 36 percent in math. For our control group, approximately 35 percent of the MPS students were at or above the median in reading, and 43 percent in math. Choice students were also behind comparable low-income students in MPS, although the math differences are not that large. Similar conclusions emerge from the other measures reported in the table.

The same conclusion emerges when we use all prior tests for all groups (Appendix Table B1). The comparisons between Choice students and all MPS students are similar to those using the last test only. Each group is slightly higher when all tests are used.[7] The differences between low-income and Choice are somewhat greater than in Table 14.[8] A major conclusion is that with either measure of prior achievement, *Choice students were not achieving as well as most students in the Milwaukee Public Schools and were slightly behind low-income MPS students.*

Summary

The picture of Choice students and parents that emerges from our initial year of research is interesting and seems to make sense. The students were not succeeding in MPS and probably had behavioral problems (based on the frequency of contacts between parents and schools on that issue). The parents, though not financially well off, were more active in the schools than average parents, and were clearly more alienated from the schools. They were seeking a better learning environment, with a better disciplinary climate. They turned to the private schools in the hope of finding that environment.

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[6]Discussion of various test measures is included in Appendix A of this report.

[7]Unfortunately, this is a pattern to be expected because students on average in MPS tend to have lower national percentile scores in the higher grades. This means that using just the last test, which of course is taken in a higher grade than other prior tests, produces lower scores than an average across all tests.

[8]The differences between low-income and non-low-income MPS students are larger than when the whole control group is used (including low-income students). For illustration, the differences by income are presented for MPS students in Appendix Table B.3.

III. THE CHOICE SCHOOLS

Introduction

In the summer of 1990, ten private schools expressed interest in and were certified by the Department of Public Instruction to enroll students in the Choice Program. Seven schools enrolled students. The majority of students (317 of 341) were in five prekindergarten-to-eighth grade schools. The other two schools (Lakeshore Montessori and SER-Jobs) had fewer students and served different educational purposes. Because SER-Jobs was unique relative to the other schools in providing an alternative educational environment, we approached evaluating it in a different manner. For example, the same achievement tests used in other schools were not a useful indicator for these students. Because of the age and number of students (two four-year-old students), it was also impossible to do a rigorous evaluation of Lakeshore Montessori. Also, because of limited time and resources, we were not able to do case studies of these schools during the first year. We will complete those studies this year.

Most of the material in this section of the report is based on case studies of four schools: Bruce Guadalupe, Harambee, Urban Day, and Woodlands.[9] As noted in Section I, to maintain confidentiality, we do not identify schools specifically, and we present aggregate data only. We do, however, discuss variation across schools without identifying schools specifically. Before discussing the four major Choice schools, we explicitly describe the problems at Juanita Virgil Academy, which closed in midyear and no longer exists.

Juanita Virgil Academy

We can provide little quantitative information on Juanita Virgil Academy, which enrolled 63 Choice students in the fall of 1990. The reason for this is that after the first semester, the school petitioned the Department of Public Instruction to be removed from the program. The reason given was that they wanted to reinstate religious training in the school. The petition was granted. Several weeks into the new semester, however, the school closed completely. The majority of students entered the Milwaukee Public Schools.

Juanita Virgil had existed as a private school for a number of years, and thus qualified for the Choice Program. The school closed before we were able to complete a case study of it, but based on several visits, parent surveys and interviews, and a long interview with the executive director of Juanita Virgil, we believe that the school was in turmoil from the beginning of the year. The principal was new, having arrived from an unsuccessful term as a principal in the Milwaukee Public Schools. When we talked to her in September 1990, she said she did not have knowledge of

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[9]We will use the short names for these schools from this point forward.

the curriculum of the school, knew very few of the teachers, and had no knowledge of any standardized testing. Although classes had been in session for several weeks, she said, "I just arrived."

And she did not last long. The executive director indicated that she fired the principal in late October. Another administrator had left earlier after a conflict with both the principal and executive director. Although an existing administrator took over day-to-day leadership, there was no indication that a new, permanent principal was hired before the school withdrew from the program and later closed.

Parents complained about transportation, food service, the lack of books and materials, space problems, overcrowded classrooms, lack of cleanliness, and a major lack of discipline. One parent wrote on the back of our survey:

> I'm extremely dissatisfied with the academic performance of the school, administrator changed November 1990 without notification to parents, spanking of children, poor quality atmosphere, transferring child back to public school, January 1991, lack of cooperation from school administration in regards to curriculum and after school activities--never met registration promises.

There were also allegations of theft and mismanagement of money, and no external financial audit was available. There was no governing structure in the school beyond an "advisory board" consisting of three friends of the executive director. In my interview with the executive director (after the school closed), she specifically stated that she never worked with executive boards because they can ". . .take over and even fire the executive director."

According to the executive director, the school closed due to a lack of funding. She also said they asked to withdraw from the Choice Program because tuition-paying parents were not happy with the school situation and they had lost their Bible classes to qualify for the Choice Program.

In summary, there is no way to interpret the Juanita Virgil experience in a positive light. It failed as a school, in the middle of the year following what had to be a questionable educational experience for more than 100 students in the prior months. *The other private schools in the Choice Program, however, have almost nothing in common with Juanita Virgil Academy.* Indeed, characteristics of the organizational and management structures of the other Choice schools--characteristics absent in Juanita Virgil--are the basis for the major regulatory recommendations presented in the final section of this report. In making these recommendations, we place priority on attempting to avoid the Juanita Virgil experience in the future. At a minimum, parents should be assured in making their school choices that a school will be able to last through the year and provide an adequate educational environment for their child.

Four Choice Schools

Organization and Personnel. Unlike Juanita Virgil, the remaining Choice schools have formal and quite elaborate organizational structures. They all have boards of directors, written operating rules, and quite extensive committee structures to handle personnel, admissions, curriculum, and other issues. The boards and committees almost all include parents, some outside community members, and members of the administrative and teaching staffs. Three of the four schools have written bylaws.

All have one or more parent groups. The parent groups meet not only on curricular matters, but also play an integral role in fund-raising, which is a formal commitment of non-Choice, tuition-paying parents in three of the schools. In two of the schools, parents sign formal contracts specifying fees, but also obligating themselves to participate in school activities, and to participate in various aspects of their child's education. In one of the schools, students sign contracts to obey rules, complete homework.

The characteristics of the teachers in the school are depicted in Table 15. The majority, but not all, of the teachers have some form of certification in Wisconsin or other states. Several of the teachers counted as noncertified have teaching certificates from other countries. Although the cultural emphasis in two of the schools is African-American and one is bilingualism and Hispanic culture, the majority of teachers are white women. The stated reason for this is that there is a shortage of minority teachers and it is difficult to compete with MPS, which has a formal commitment to increase the percentage of minority teachers in its system. Competition with MPS is difficult because the Choice schools pay teachers much less at all levels than the public schools.

Pay is also the major reason for the high teacher turnover in the schools. Average teacher seniority was 4.2 years, with 38 percent of the staff in their first year. At least six of the new teachers, however, filled expansion positions. When we asked teachers if they were going to look for other jobs for the next year, over 50 percent said they thought so. The stated reason for this was usually salaries. As one principal put it (and another concurred when I repeated the comment): "The teachers who stay here for a long time are either very dedicated or can afford to stay on what we pay."

Turnover of administrative leaders was also high. In two of the schools, the principals or executive directors had been in their positions two years. In one school, the principal had been with the school for 16 years and had been principal for 13. This year, however, there is a new principal in that school. In the final school, there was a new principal in 1990, who resigned partway through the year. The teacher who replaced him had planned to be with the school for only one year and therefore, a new principal is in that school for the 1991-92 year.

Staff continuity is a problem in these schools. With some exceptions, however, the underlying problem is not dissatisfaction with the school environment or teaching, but with the pay. Teachers and administrators went out of their way to describe

how they enjoyed the small class sizes they taught (averaging 16.5 students), the autonomy they had in the classroom, the usually congenial atmosphere in the schools, and the support they received in disciplinary matters. Other than pay, the most general complaints were lack of materials and teaching aids.[10]

There was also some racial tension in several schools. The source of the problems often stemmed from parent-teacher interactions in which the parents complained that white teachers were not able to convey the African-American or Hispanic cultures that were supposed to be emphasized. In the Hispanic bilingual school, there was also a problem with teachers who were not fluent in Spanish.

Finally, several of the schools were suffering from recent changes in affiliation and location. One had moved into its existing building in September 1990 (as had Juanita Virgil Academy). Another had moved two years earlier, but many of the parents were not happy with the new location. An effort to acquire adequate funds to build a new building was abandoned during the 1990-91 year. Both of these schools had long historical affiliations with churches and religiously affiliated schools. Being on their own created financial hardships. Moving meant a loss of students, teachers, and administrators, as well as the normal difficulties associated with changing facilities.

Curriculum. In many respects, the curriculum of these schools is similar to curriculum in most other elementary and middle schools. With one exception, where two grade levels are combined in classes, grade structures and teacher assignments are standard. One of the schools offers Head Start classes and two others pre-5-year-old kindergarten. The curriculum is relatively rich. Music and or dance classes are offered in each school, usually twice per week. Two of the schools have daily Spanish classes for most students (grades 3 to 8 in one school). French is offered in another school. Three of the schools also have computer labs and classes that utilize computers. Computer training occurs an average of twice a week in the higher grades.[11] One of the schools had health classes for all students once a week. All of the schools had physical education, usually twice weekly.[12]

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[10]This was an extreme problem in one of the schools, which did not have adequate textbooks in some classes until well into the second semester. It was also a serious problem in other schools in areas such as science, where it was hard for the teachers to innovate and compensate for the dearth of equipment and materials.

[11]Other than organized class instruction, students also use computers on their own and for individual projects.

[12]Recess and physical education facilities were relatively poor in the schools. One school had easy access to a city park for recess, one relied on a blocked off street, two others asphalt playgrounds with some wood chips and playground equipment. All the schools had some indoor space for physical education, but it often served multiple purposes (cafeterias, detention areas, etc.).

Two of the schools stressed African-American culture and one of the schools stressed Hispanic culture and bilingualism. Although this type of cultural emphasis has created intense debate around the country, in these schools the approach seemed positive. We never saw evidence of teaching cultural superiority or separatism. The emphasis was on understanding differences and understanding the history and accomplishments of various racial groups. In addition, although classrooms and hallways were decorated with multicultural themes, and historical and cultural examples were more prevalent than in schools without a specific cultural emphasis, instructional patterns, exercises, books and materials were not that different from other schools. For example, in one first-grade class, a male black teacher on two successive days taught "The Little Engine That Could" and "The Little Red Hen."

Classes. Our research teams conducted classroom observations in almost every classroom in the four private schools that enrolled almost all the Choice students (56 classrooms). Classroom observation was both ethnographic and quantitative. As researchers observed the rooms, they also coded activities that took place in each of nine five-minute time periods, making up an average 45-minute class. The results of the classroom observations appear in Table 16.

Our observations indicate that classes were conducted much in the ordinary fashion. Children spent most of their time listening to the teacher, doing seat work, and engaged in nonacademic activities (to and from the bathroom, moving from one activity to the other, getting materials, fooling around, etc.). Teachers spent most of their time lecturing or instructing, and monitoring or reviewing students' work. Lessons were focused mostly on skills (e.g., reading and math problem solving) with a considerable time spent on helping students understand. In general, texts or materials were not the focus of instruction--the teacher was. Most of the instruction was in whole-class settings (83 percent of the classes were a whole class for at least half the period). Approximately half the time was spent on instruction as opposed to monitoring or reviewing student work.

Time on task--meaning the time students spent doing what the teacher and instructional environment dictated--was very high. Thirty-seven percent of the students were on task the entire period, 40 percent for more than half the period. Discipline in the classroom was modest, the time spent disciplining students taking less than half the time period in 82 percent of the periods observed. No disciplinary activity was observed in 14 percent of the classes.

The vast majority of classes were either "fairly clean" or "clean" (61 percent). Physical and social order was also high. Eighty-eight percent of the classes were physically on the "ordered" as opposed to the "chaotic" side, and 81 percent were orderly in terms of the social setting. Most of the classes were quiet (62 percent), the rest noisy, perhaps appropriately. As expected, classes were more orderly in the lower grades. Also the numbers of students in each classroom declined in higher grades. It was not uncommon to find 30 or 40 students in the kindergarten and grades one to two (but split into multiple classes), but only 15 in grades seven and eight.

In one school, teachers also consistently complained about the influx of new students and the shifts in administrative leadership. During the period in which we did our case study, the same school had a problem with discipline, primarily due to the arrival of a substantial number of "contract" students. MPS contracts with private schools to work with students with special problems, including behavioral problems. One of the schools had accepted 38 contract students (approximately 20 percent of the school enrollment) four weeks before we arrived in April. These students were creating a great deal of difficulty in the school. Parents went to the extreme of having a parent "on duty" in the office to monitor the disciplinary conditions in the school. Four of these students were returned to MPS just prior to our visit.

We also felt that in one school the instructional time was very short. This was due to a late start, early finish, and a relatively long lunch break. The late starting and early ending time was the direct result of busing arrangements. Students not from the neighborhood rode yellow buses. Given the long divergent routes, some of the most distant students were on buses for over three hours each day. To accommodate this schedule, the instructional time was short. Partly in response to this problem, we recommend in Section V that the legislature consider changes in the transportation arrangements.

What we observed in the classroom covered the range of teaching and learning styles and levels of effectiveness. I personally observed a gifted teacher who had been teaching mathematics for 15 years in almost the exact manner now being recommended by the National Association of Teachers of Mathematics. She was deservedly featured in a popular nationally televised news show on the Choice Program. I also witnessed classes taught by tired teachers who were barely holding the class together. In some classrooms, there was regimented, strict discipline that demanded complete silence and students' hands on their desks. In others, there was joking and exchange, with students split into "nonsilent" groups working in organized chaos. In others, when there were problems of discipline or arguments, time-outs were often called. In one school, these sessions, as well as a systematic program which stressed individual and communal values were called "time for living."

What we came away with, more than anything else, was a feeling that there was not any formula for teaching, but rather a diversity of styles that fit the class and the teacher. What we know is that the teachers appreciated the opportunity to select their own style.

Students Attitudes. Attitudes of very young elementary school students are not easy to tap. Table 17 contains the results of a questionnaire administered to the Choice students in our four case study schools. There are several questions asked only of the older students.

The results are generally positive, with some striking findings. Over 80 percent of the students at both grade levels believe their school gave students a good education. Students generally approved of teachers and teaching practices (see Questions 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15). Although they felt their teachers treated them fairly, however, only 39 percent and 42 percent felt that "school rules are fair"

(Question 19). Nearly all students reported that principals had visited their classrooms, which conformed to our observations as well. None of the principals were "office bound." Indeed, we had difficulty finding them and getting an hour of their time for an interview.

The environment in the school was also quite positive. Students reported they felt safe everywhere in the school, and almost no one reported drug or alcohol problems (Questions 30, 31). On the negative side, 36 percent of the older students and 40 percent of the younger students reported that fighting was a problem (Question 3). Also more students disagreed (53 and 43 percent) than agreed (40 and 39 percent) with the statement, "I trust most of the people at my school" (Question 2). Finally, students confirmed what other evidence has indicated, that expectations by both parents and teachers were very high. Ninety-four percent of the older students and 89 percent of the younger agreed that ". . .teachers expect students to do their best all the time" (Question 4). And nearly everyone agreed that their parents expect them to get good grades (Question 25).

Parental Involvement. Parental involvement is stressed in all of the Choice schools. It is part of the contracts signed by parents in two of the schools. Involvement takes several forms: (1) organized activities that range from work on committees and boards to teas and fund-raising events; (2) involvement in educational activities such as chaperoning field trips, and helping out in the classroom or with other special events. Some parents volunteer their time; others are paid as teacher aides.

Parents are also explicitly asked to work with their child on educational activities at home. As demonstrated in Table 12, Choice parents were more likely than MPS parents to work with their children at home in their prior school. Choice parents who responded to our second survey in June 1991 indicated that parental activity both at home and in the Choice schools was even higher than reported in their prior public schools. For example, as indicated in Table 11, which reports organized parent activity, every category of parental involvement except belonging to a parent/teacher organization was higher in the private schools than in prior public schools. The low response to this question by all groups may be because formal membership in PTO-type organizations is not stressed and what it means to be a member is often unclear. As discussed earlier, involvement of Choice parents was higher than the average MPS parent, and the differences increased when the parents had children in private schools.

Participation in children's learning activities at home, depicted in the lower portion of Table 12, also increased in key areas and remained substantially higher than the MPS parent group. This was true of homework in general, reading, and working on mathematics. There was slightly less involvement reported in writing, educational television, and participating in sports activities.

Differences are less clear in terms of *parents contacting schools* (Table 10). Although Choice parents were more likely to contact schools than MPS parents, both before and while in the Choice Program, the major activities that appear to have

increased for Choice parents were doing volunteer work in the schools and participating in fund-raising. Although Choice parents did not have the contractual obligations of other parents, they seemed to respond in a similar manner.

There is also an indication (Table 9) that the *private schools contacted parents* more often than the public schools had contacted Choice parents, but again the major differences are in the areas of doing volunteer work and fund-raising. Thus an interesting and positive result of schools being continually strapped financially is that it forces parents to be involved in the schools. In one area, contact by the school was less--on disciplinary problems with the student. That, of course, is not a negative result and, as will be discussed in the next section, is consistent with parents' greater satisfaction with school discipline in the private schools.

Summary

There was clearly variation in quality among the Choice schools in the program. One of the original schools had severe difficulties and was closed in the middle of the year. Thus merely being a private school does not necessarily insure an adequate educational environment. The remaining schools in the program did not exhibit the severe problems of Juanita Virgil Academy. The most serious institutional problems were high staff turnover due to low pay, and dealing with recent changes in location and affiliation for several of the schools. In other respects, the schools were more than adequate educational institutions. In general, they have elaborate and refined organizational structures that heavily involve parents in the schools. The students have a positive attitude toward their environment and teachers. Classes that we observed were generally small, with a high proportion of time spent on task. The curricula in the schools were relatively rich in terms of arts, music and dance, languages, and computer use. The cultural emphasis in several of these schools was distinct and seemed positive. And most of the instruction we observed was very similar in substance and style to instruction in ordinary public schools. Finally, parental involvement, which was initially high for Choice parents in their prior schools, generally increased in the private schools, especially in the areas of volunteering and fund-raising.

IV. PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

The outcomes reported below are based on nine months of activity, at most, and they involve small numbers of students and parents. Again, we remind the reader of the preliminary nature of this report. Each year the program continues we will learn more, and each annual report, therefore, will be more conclusive.

We discuss five types of outcome measures in this section: (1) achievement test results; (2) attendance data; (3) parent attitudes; (4) parental involvement; and (5) attrition from the program. The legislation specified that suspension, expulsion, and dropping out must also be monitored. Those measures, however, if they have any

reliability would be meaningful only at the high-school level.[13] The only high-school level program in the Choice schools is in SER-Jobs for Progress and it is unclear, given its alternative nature, what the relevant measures or MPS comparisons would be.[14] Thus we report only on the five areas indicated above.

Achievement Test Results

Table 18 provides the aggregate test results for 1991 for Choice students in the four private schools. Tests were administered in late April in two schools and in May in the other two. MPS tests were given in May.

The results may be compared with those in Table 14, which indicated prior test scores for those students on whom we had data. As stated above, those data indicated the Choice students were clearly behind the average MPS student, and also behind a large random sample of low-income MPS students. There was not a dramatic change in those results. The Choice students clearly are not yet on par with the average MPS student in reading and math skills. In comparison to the low-income students, they are slightly above them in reading scores, but below in math.

I remind the reader that all of these scores are relative to a national population. In that sense, Choice students, on average, improved in reading (Median national percentiles for the group rose from 30 to 34), but were lower in mathematics (Median scores declined from 33 to 30).[15] MPS and low-income students declined

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[13]For example, there is almost no dropping out at the elementary level. Dropout rates are also extremely low in middle schools. In MPS, suspensions are also rare in these grades and the policies and reporting vary considerably from school to school. For example, student fighting, which leads to a suspension in most of the private schools for up to three days, may result in a student being sent home in MPS. Whether that becomes an official suspension or not may depend on the principal and the reactions of the child or parents. The numbers of official expulsions are even smaller than dropouts or suspensions. See John F. Witte, "Metropolitan Milwaukee Dropout Report," Report of the Commission on the Quality and Equity of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Public Schools, 1985.

[14]The noncompletion rate for Choice students in SER Jobs for Progress was 52 percent (14 of 27) for the 1990-91 year. Of those, 4 dropped out voluntarily, 5 were dropped due to excessive truancy, 3 transferred to other schools, and 2 moved out of Milwaukee. Of those who completed two semesters, the modal number of credits they received was 5 for the year. What is difficult, given that most of these students were on the verge of dropping out, is what these numbers mean in terms of success or failure.

[15]The numbers reported in Table 18 are for the total groups of students in the respective categories. For a very small sample of 76 Choice students, we can compare individual 1990 and 1991 tests. For those students, the resulting changes are generally consistent with the aggregate results. Fifty-one percent of the students improved their reading scores (in terms of NPRs), 44 percent had lower scores and 5 percent scored the same. For math, 47 percent improved and 53 percent had lower scores. In terms of changes in NCEs, the average change for students was +1.82 for reading and (counter to the results in Table 18),

slightly in both areas relative to the national population.

Although the numbers of students in any grade were too small to provide much information, we did note that the first-grade class was somewhat extreme on both measures. For example, 52 percent of the 40 Choice first graders were at or above the national median in reading on the 1991 tests. Only 20 percent of that group were above the median in math.

If there is any firm conclusion from these results, and we are not sure if there is much of one, it is that when students begin as far behind as the students apparently did in the first year of this program, seven or eight months will not produce dramatic changes in test scores.

Attendance

Attendance is not a very discriminating measure of educational performance at this level because there is little school-to-school variation. For example, in the last three years, average attendance in MPS elementary schools has been 92 percent in each year. Middle-school attendance for the same years averaged 89, 88, and 89 percent. Attendance of Choice students in the private schools (excluding SER-Jobs) averaged 94 percent, which puts them ahead of Milwaukee, but the differences are obviously slight. It can obviously be concluded that overall attendance is satisfactory and not a problem in any of these schools.

Parent Attitudes

Attitudes Toward the Schools. Those Choice parents who completed a final survey in 1991 had very positive attitudes toward their schools.[16] Two facts about parental attitudes toward the schools are relevant. The first is shown in Table 19 for 1991. This table may be compared with Table 7 (and C1 for all original Choice parents). The results show a striking contrast. On every item, not only are the

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a slight increase (+.62) for math. None of the changes approaches conventional levels of statistical reliability.

[16]The survey results reported in the body of the report do not include parents who were not in the Choice program at the end of the year (mostly parents from Juanita Virgil Academy). When those 31 parents are included, the results are not as positive. We exclude those parents from the results in Tables 8-12 and 19 because of the unique conditions surrounding Juanita Virgil and because results in the rest of the report (case study and outcome measures) do not include data on these students or schools. In addition, although parents were instructed in a cover letter to answer questions relative to the private schools, we have no guarantee this was done for families whose children were attending other schools when they received the survey. *Results including the parents no longer in the Choice Program are presented in Appendix C.* Although the results are generally less positive, they remain considerably more positive overall than attitudes toward their prior (public) schools.

Choice parents considerably more satisfied than MPS parents, they are much more satisfied than they were with their prior (public) school. For example, there is a 29 percent increase in the percentage of parents who say they are "very satisfied" with "amount child learned" over the prior public school. Satisfaction with "opportunities for parental involvement" increase 41 percent in the very satisfied category. Similar gains are registered for teachers, program of instruction, and the principal's performance.

Second, these attitudes are also consistent with the general rating Choice parents give their private schools on the A to F grading system. As shown in Table 8, 84 percent give their private schools a grade of A or B, with an average of 3.3. This compares to prior school ratings that had only 32 percent in the A or B range, and an average of 2.1. If all the parents who responded to the survey are included, the rating is lower-- 71 percent A or B, with a 2.9 average. Those numbers are very close to the grades MPS parents give MPS schools.

Attitudes Toward the Choice Program. We also asked parents in the second survey if they planned to continue participation in the Choice Program and what they liked and disliked about the program. We also asked them if they felt the program should continue, and if they would continue in the Choice schools even if they had to pay their own tuition.

In spite of the attrition that occurred throughout the Choice Program's first year, nearly all of the parents remaining with the schools at the end of the year indicated they were going to continue in the program. Ninety-nine out of 102 said their children were coming back. Forty-two percent of those parents said they would continue at the school even if they had to pay their own tuition. When asked if the program should continue, 102 of 103 replied yes.

In response to open-ended questions, depicted in Table 20, concerning why they were going to stay in the program, 44 percent of the responses referred to educational qualities of the schools, while 33 percent mentioned positive qualities of the schools specifically related to their child. When we asked them what they liked about the program, we received 145 positive responses (We coded up to 3 per respondent). Most responses, again, were in the area of educational quality of the schools. Eleven percent directly said they wanted a private education, but without the Choice Program could not afford it.

The majority of dislikes, which elicited 50 responses, were very specific complaints concerning general school qualities, tuition, fund-raising requirements, etc. In that general category, the most prevalent response (8 of 50) was the fear that the program would be terminated, disrupting their child's education.

The number of positive responses decline when we analyze responses for all parents, including those parents who were no longer in the Choice schools at the end of the year. However, the positive responses are still very high. For example, 118 out of 133 parents (89 percent) indicated they would enroll their child in a Choice school in the following year. And 49 percent of that number indicated they would do so even if the Choice Program no longer paid tuition. In addition, of the 140

surveys, 128 (91 percent) indicated the program should continue, only 4 said it should not, and 8 did not respond to the question.

Parental Involvement

Changes in parental involvement were reviewed in the discussion in the last section under that heading. To reiterate, results displayed in Tables 9 to 12 (with parallel tables C2-5 for all original Choice parents) demonstrate even more impressive parental involvement than the high levels Choice parents exhibited in their prior schools. Contacts by the school, contacts of schools by parents, and participation in teacher conferences and school organizations were all generally higher. The same was true for some of the critical home activities, such as reading, mathematics, and other homework. The exception in this pattern was that there was less frequent parent-school contact over disciplinary matters, which we interpret as a positive change.

Again, the results are less positive when parents are included who began in the Choice Program but who were not in the Choice schools at the end of the year. Even with those parents included, however, participation in contrast to the average MPS parent is considerably higher. As a comparison of Tables 9 to 12 and C2 to C4 demonstrates, this is true of all forms of participation we measured.

Attrition From the Program

Other than the failure of Juanita Virgil Academy, perhaps the most troubling aspect of the results of the first year of the Choice Program is the rate of attrition. Enrollment in the Choice program was as follows:

Sept 1990	341
Jan 1991	259
June 1991	249
Returning students Sept. 1991	155
New students Sept. 1991	407
TOTAL students Sept. 1991	562

The attrition from September to June is accounted for mostly by the closing of Juanita Virgil Academy which began the year with 63 students. Excluding those students, 29 left the schools (a disproportionate number of those students were in SER-Jobs For Progress). Including Ser-Jobs, but excluding Juanita Virgil, the attrition within the first year is 10 percent (29/278). That compares favorably with mobility rates from September to June in MPS schools. The average mobility rate is 33 percent in MPS. That figure, however, includes both "in" and "out" transfers from schools between September and June. Because the Choice Program did not include "in" transfers (although several did come in), if we assume there were equal numbers of in and out transfers in MPS, the comparable rate would 16.5 percent. Thus not counting Juanita

Virgil, attrition within the year was less than MPS and is certainly reasonable given the residential mobility of inner-city families.[17]

What is surprising, and was not anticipated based on what the schools were informally told by parents or what parents told us on our surveys, is the sharp drop in the number of students over the summer. Utilizing information from the schools and short telephone surveys, we are currently investigating why parents withdrew over the summer. Locating these parents has been difficult. We know that of the 94 students who were in the program in June but who did not return in September, 8 graduated from Choice schools. Excluding these students, there still is an attrition of 35 percent over the summer.

That means that of the original 341 students, excluding 8 graduates, only 46.5 percent (155/333) returned the second year. If we exclude Juanita Virgil from the computations, 57 percent (155/270) returned.

The questions remaining are how to interpret these attrition rates and why the attrition was so high over the summer when so many other signs from parents were positive. Unfortunately, MPS does not routinely report comparable data for transfers in and out of schools over the summer. Future analysis of student records for the MPS control group may be of some help, although given that most Choice schools are in a prekindergarten-to-eighth grade format, and most Milwaukee schools are prekindergarten-to-sixth grade with separate middle schools, obtaining comparable data will not be easy.[18]

A number of factors could explain the drop over the summer. Obviously, the relatively poor results on test scores could lead to parental dissatisfaction with their child's academic progress. But that is at odds with parent responses to surveys. If those who responded to the surveys were more often parents whose children did well, the survey results would be a poor indicator of satisfaction. To test for that, we computed test results for only those students whose parents responded to the second survey. The results vary somewhat by subject matter. There were only minor differences, however, between groups and none of the differences approached statistical significance.[19]

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[17]Including Juanita Virgil, the rate is 27 percent, which is higher than the 16.5 percent rate estimated for transfers out of MPS.

[18]The best approach is probably to compute an average grade-to-grade transfer rate, ignoring natural transitions from elementary to middle school. This would be done by computing the number of school changes (excluding sixth to seventh grade changes where appropriate) for all students divided by the years they are in the system. Because of the alternative nature of the SER Jobs program, we would do this only through the eighth grade and exclude the SER Jobs attrition from the analysis.

[19]In terms of NCEs, the mean of the survey group was 42.9 for reading and 40.3 for math. This compared with the nonrespondent scores of 40.7 and 38.4. Neither difference approached a standard .05 confidence level. The median NPRs for survey respondents were 35 on reading and 30 on math. This

Another explanation would be simple response bias. The respondents knew we were evaluating the program and felt we were looking for positive results. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing or measuring that possibility.

Other explanations may be that the attrition rate merely reflects the high degree of family residential mobility. We know that of the 86 nongraduating students who left over the summer, 40 enrolled in MPS schools in September. We also know that some moved out of the MPS district. Others became ineligible for the Choice Program due to changes in income status. We are investigating those who are still unaccounted for.

Finally, it could be possible that because parents were uncertain whether the program would continue, when an alternative permanent arrangement became available, they took it. Uncertainty was the leading factor that parents disliked about the Choice Program. Again, a multi-year evaluation is needed to provide more definitive answers.

Summary

Preliminary outcomes after the first year of the Choice Program were mixed. Achievement test scores did not register dramatic gains and the Choice students remained approximately equal to low-income students in MPS (higher on reading, slightly lower on math). Based on individual changes in national percentile rankings, approximately as many Choice students gained as declined. All these results are based on a small number of students.

Student attendance, parental attitudes toward schools, opinions of the Choice program, and parental involvement were all positive. Attendance was slightly higher than the average elementary school attendance in MPS. Parental attitudes towards their schools and education of their children were much more positive than their evaluations of their prior public schools. This shift occurred in every category (teachers, principals, instruction, discipline, etc.). When parents of students who did not finish the year in a Choice school were included, the results were similar, although not as pronounced. Similarly, parental involvement, which was more frequent than for the average MPS parent in prior schools, was even greater for most activities in the private schools.

Attrition appears to be high. During the school year, most students leaving the program were from Juanita Virgil Academy, which closed in February 1991. The educational experience of Juanita Virgil students was undoubtedly negative. But a considerable number of students who completed the school year in the Choice schools did not re-enroll in Choice schools in September 1991. Our report expresses uncertainty as to why. It is possible that problems in the schools, especially modest

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is almost identical to the median scores (34 reading, 30 math) reported in Table 18. In addition, the sample of 1991 respondents was even less well off than those who responded to the first survey. For example, on the first survey, 57 percent of the respondents were receiving AFDC or public assistance. That compares with 63 percent for respondents in the second survey.

achievement gains could have been a factor. That, however, is at odds with survey results that indicate parent satisfaction with child learning. It is possible that this attrition reflects the uncertainty of the program's future due to legal challenges.

V. LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are premised on the general recommendation that the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program should be continued in a form similar to the current one for enough years to complete a comprehensive evaluation. Although all of the suggestions offered for consideration are subject to legislative change, some of the changes fit within the current legislation and are merely formalizing administrative practices developed during the first year, or could be added as new administrative rules. We first discuss those changes that would require some redrafting of the original statute.

Legislative Changes

A basic issue in this program is the idea of accountability. Put simply, there are two approaches to educational accountability. One is state and district regulated accountability in which legally responsible authorities require schools and/or districts to adhere to specified practices, standards, and reporting of outcome measures. The other is that parents can best exercise accountability and determine the adequacy of educational outcomes by making free choices among schools. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was premised on the latter theory. Although we recommend for consideration modest additional regulation, this should not be interpreted as a suggestion that the legislature abandon parental accountability as the main principle of this program.

The operation and closing of Juanita Virgil Academy was the most troublesome aspect of the first year of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. There are those who would argue that the failure of that school is to be expected in a market system of education. Whether one believes that expectation outweighs the fact that approximately 150 children essentially lost a year's education is a value issue that we cannot resolve. Whatever one's values are, the price was high for those families involved.

We believe that very simple regulations requiring a formal governance structure, financial reporting, and further accountability in terms of outcomes would greatly reduce the likelihood that schools would close mid-year. These regulations are premised on the theory that parental choice remains the mechanism of accountability. The additional regulations are meant to provide enhanced information with which parents can make choices and exercise that accountability.

We recommend three sets of provisions for certifying new private schools in the Choice Program. The ideas for these regulations came from our case studies of the current Choice schools. All of the six Choice schools currently in the program

meet almost all of these suggested requirements; Juanita Virgil did not meet any of them.

Governance. All schools participating in the Parental Choice Program should have a formal governance structure including a board of directors (school board). The board can be structured by the schools as they see fit, but must include a specified and formal process for selection and terms of members. It should also include at least some members who have no proprietary interest in the school. It should also include parents. We also recommend that the school have formal bylaws. The board should have the authority to promulgate and amend the bylaws and establish whatever additional governing structure is seen as appropriate. Board meetings should be held in accordance with state open meeting laws.

Financial Reporting. All schools participating in the Parental Choice Program must conduct an annual financial audit which meets the accounting standards for private, nonprofit organizations. The report should be a matter of public record and be filed annually with the Department of Public Instruction.

Added Accountability. Schools should be required to meet all current and future state *outcome* requirements, including statewide tests, dropout reporting, and a school report card when it is required.

Review Accountability Standards. We recommend that the legislature review the current standards of accountability as specified in the statute. At present, schools may meet any one of four standards (attendance, achievement, grade advancement, or parental involvement). We suggest that the schools meet more than one of these standards. We also suggest flexibility in the standards based on the level of the school. For example, 90 percent attendance is adequate for elementary schools, but would be very high for high schools, especially alternative high schools. (MPS high schools, including specialty high schools average 82 percent attendance.)

Program Information. To facilitate parent knowledge of the program and the Choice schools, we suggest that the legislature consider making information on the Choice Program available through the extensive school selection process in MPS. Specifically, information on the Choice Program and schools should be displayed along with other MPS specialty school and program options, and the Chapter 220 program. If this is not acceptable, at a minimum, the schools should be allowed to display brochures in the pupil assignment and school information rooms at MPS headquarters. MPS should not bear any costs or be held accountable in any way for the private schools.

Selection Procedures. Currently the statutes require schools to collect applications through June 30, and then apply random selection if there are more applications than slots. This means that schools are not able to guarantee parents a position for a

new student until after June 30. In contrast, assignments are made in MPS in the early spring. To avoid this problem, it may be advisable to have an "early enrollment" period (ending, for example, on March 31) that avoids random assignment for a portion of the seats anticipated in a school.

Explicit language could be added to the statute forbidding schools from using achievement or behavioral records or information in making their enrollment decisions. The remaining seats would follow the existing timetable, but the restrictions on admission criteria would continue to apply. Schools would, however, be allowed to enroll students up to one week prior to the first class day if positions remained open and total Choice enrollment did not exceed the 49 percent limit. In addition to the current monitoring of this process by the Department of Public Instruction, the school board for each school should be required to certify that the procedures were followed.

Administrative Changes

Selection. A series of administrative decisions concerning selection that were made during the first year should be added to the formal administrative rules. For example, oversubscription was defined by grade, not by a school as a whole. In addition, siblings of already admitted Choice students were not required to be subject to the random selection process. Finally, students admitted in one year were automatically readmitted, with the only condition being that their household income had not gone above the required limit. Finally, waiting lists were established in oversubscribed schools based on the random selection process.

Transportation. Presently schools must choose either to provide busing, for which the school is reimbursed, or parents must provide transportation, for which the parents are reimbursed at the end of the year. There are numerous problems with these arrangements. First, forcing all students into one or the other of these patterns does not meet varying family needs. Some families can provide private (or public) transportation, some cannot. Reimbursement for private transportation also causes financial hardships because it comes in one payment at the end of the year. Semester payments would improve this situation. Finally, the paucity and expense of yellow buses makes for very long bus rides for some, and a short instructional day. This is a more difficult problem to solve, but alternative arrangements should be analyzed.

Summer School. One of the schools was partially reimbursed for Choice students attending summer school. That practice should be added to the rules, along with a simplified method of computing reimbursement.

Reporting. Schools should be explicitly required to submit the names, grade, gender, and race of Choice students following the third-Friday counts in September and January. For administrative and evaluation purposes, they should also be

required to submit a similar list following the end of the school year. It would also be very helpful for administrative and evaluation purposes if the schools would provide the reason a student left the school during the year and the number of graduates from the school at the end of the year. If the information is available, a similar list would be useful of students who completed the year, did not graduate, but did not return to the schools the next year.

Other Issues

Learning Disabled and Emotionally Disturbed Students. Several schools currently put in their school literature that they are not equipped to teach learning disabled (LD) or emotionally disturbed (ED) students. Because it is not always easy to detect these conditions in students, the schools end up working with more LD and ED students than their literature indicates. None of the current Choice schools, as presently configured, however, can adequately teach ED students and they would not be able to teach large numbers of LD students effectively. The legislature may wish to consider a higher per member payment if schools are willing to accept LD students and applicable state standards. Differential reimbursement could be computed based on the costs of providing public school education for LD students.

Second-Semester Admission. The legislature may also wish to consider whether students should be allowed to enter the program during the year, or at the beginning of the second semester. All other rules would apply. If the school was filled, but students have left, providing new openings, new positions would have to be offered first to those on school waiting lists.

Administrative Costs. The Choice schools report considerable added administrative costs for the program. The legislature may wish to study this problem over the current school year for future consideration in adjusting payments to cover these costs.

Expansion of the Program. Currently, limitation of the total students enrolled to one percent of the MPS enrollment is not a constraint, and thus we recommend no changes. We also do not recommend considering other cities until the legal issues are decided. In January, we will conduct a study of potential slots in existing Choice schools and other schools that would qualify. We will try to determine what factors, including levels of tuition, building capacity, and admissions practices might be preventing them from entering the program. There should be considerably more information in next year's report on the issue of program size.

Table 1. Factors Affecting Decisions To Participate In Choice Program, 1990 (Percentages)

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	(N)
Educational Quality in Chosen School	89	8	2	1	(148)
Discipline in Chosen School	81	17	3	0	(164)
General Atmosphere in Chosen School	75	22	1	1	(145)
Financial Considerations	68	26	3	2	(144)
Frustration With Public Schools	66	17	11	7	(145)
Special Programs in Chosen Schools	62	27	4	6	(146)
Location of Chosen School	59	21	17	3	(146)
Other Children in Chosen School	36	30	15	19	(146)

Question: "Please rate all of the following issues and their importance in your decision to participate in the Choice Program."

Table 2. Satisfaction With Information on Private School Choice, 1990 (Percentages)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	(N)*
Amount Information on Choice Program	37	48	11	3	(145)
Accuracy Information on Choice Program	29	52	14	5	(146)
Amount Information on Private Schools	23	48	23	6	(146)
Accuracy Information on Private Schools	26	48	21	5	(141)
Assistance From School You Applied To	48	36	11	6	(132)
Assistance From Dept. of Public Instruction in Madison	17	42	31	10	(97)

Question: "How satisfied were you with the following?" (Please circle one number or not applicable)

* N's do not include not applicable or missing data

Table 3. Household Income (Percentages)

	Choice Parents	MPS Parents	MPS Low-Income Parents
$0 - $2999	10	8	12
$3000-$4999	5	5	7
$5000-$7499	22	11	17
$7500-$9999	18	12	17
$10000-$14999	23	12	18
$15000-$19999	6	9	11
$20000-$24999	8	9	7
$25000-$34999	7	15	7
$35000-$49999	0	13	3
$50000 and over	0	8	0
(N)	(146)	(1513)	(880)

Question: "What is your family/household income range for one year?"

Table 4. Employment, Public Assistance Status (Percentages)

	Mother/ Female Guardian			Father/ Male Guardian		
	Yes	No	(N)	Yes	No	(N)
CHOICE PARENTS						
Employed Full Time	42	58	(137)	72	28	(87)
Employed Part Time	24	76	(129)	13	87	(69)
Receiving Unemployment Comp.	9	91	(130)	9	91	(82)
Receiving AFDC or General Assistance	57	43	(143)	5	95	(82)
MPS PARENTS						
Employed Full Time	44	56	(1444)	74	26	(1139)
Employed Part Time	27	73	(1140)	10	90	(733)
Receiving Unemployment Comp.	3	97	(1401)	5	95	(1049)
Receiving AFDC or General Assistance	39	61	(1473)	11	89	(1020)
MPS LOW-INCOME PARENTS ONLY						
Employed Full Time	33	67	(842)	59	41	(569)
Employed Part Time	22	78	(692)	11	89	(390)
Receiving Unemployment Comp.	3	97	(799)	5	95	(514)
Receiving AFDC or General Assistance	59	41	(863)	19	81	(490)

Table 5. Parent Education (Percentages)

	8th Grade	Some H.S.	G.E.D.	H.S.	Some College	College Grad	Some Post Grad	(N)
CHOICE PARENTS								
Mother/Female Guardian	3	12	9	22	49	5	1	(146)
Father/ Male Guardian	8	14	10	25	33	7	2	(98)
MPS PARENTS								
Mother/Female Guardian	8	18	7	28	29	6	5	(1525)
Father/Male Guardian	9	16	8	26	27	9	6	(1127)
MPS LOW-INCOME PARENTS ONLY								
Mother/Female Guardian	12	25	9	25	26	3	1	(881)
Father/Male Guardian	15	22	9	25	21	6	2	(535)

Table 6. Parent Age (Percentages).

	20 or Less	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	40+	Mean Years	(N)
CHOICE PARENTS								
Mother/Female Guardian	0	9	24	40	19	9	33.2	(141)
Father/ Male Guardian	4	28	32	32	17	19	35.1	(96)
MPS PARENTS								
Mother/Female Guardian	1	4	20	30	25	21	35.7	(1537)
Father/Male Guardian	0	2	13	25	26	34	38.4	(1153)
MPS LOW-INCOME PARENTS ONLY								
Mother/Female Guardian	0	6	25	31	20	17	34.6	(887)
Father/Male Guardian	0	2	17	20	23	29	37.6	(566)

Table 7. Choice and MPS Parent Satisfaction With Prior (Public) School (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, 1990

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	(N)*
Textbooks	19	65	11	5	(125)
Location of School	35	38	13	13	(136)
Opportunities For Parent Involvement	21	55	16	8	(131)
Teacher's Performance	31	37	21	13	(135)
Program of Instruction	20	47	26	8	(132)
Principal's Performance	27	34	27	12	(133)
Amount Child Learned	24	27	31	18	(136)
Discipline in the School	17	32	35	17	(133)

MPS PARENTS, 1991

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	(N)*
Textbooks	29	63	6	1	(1419)
Location of School	41	44	10	5	(1511)
Opportunities For Parent Involvement	36	54	8	3	(1504)
Teacher's Performance	40	48	9	3	(1548)
Program of Instruction	33	56	9	3	(1513)
Principal's Performance	37	48	9	5	(1482)
Amount Child Learned	36	47	13	4	(1551)
Discipline in the School	27	48	17	8	(1519)

Question: "How satisfied were you with the following in last year's school?" (Please circle one number or don't know on each line)

Table 8. Choice And MPS Parent Grades For Prior Public Schools

	Choice Parents Grade For Prior (Public) School, 1990	MPS Parents Grade For Public Schools, 1991	MPS Low-Income Parents Grade For Public Schools, 1991	Choice Parents Grade For Private Schools, 1991
A	14%	27%	26%	44%
B	18%	39%	39%	41%
C	32%	22%	24%	15%
D	24%	8%	8%	0
F	14%	3%	3%	1%
Avg. Grade	2.1	2.9	2.8	3.3
(N)	(139)	(1591)	(932)	(103)

Question: "What overall grade would you give to your child's school (last/this past) year?"

Table 9. Choice and MPS Parents Frequency of Being Contacted By Their Schools (percentages).

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIOR (PUBLIC) SCHOOL 1990

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	38	35	17	10	(132)
Child's Behavior	36	28	22	14	(134)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	59	18	15	9	(135)
Participating In Fund Raising	46	35	11	7	(134)

MPS PARENTS, 1991

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	49	30	14	7	(1591)
Child's Behavior	48	29	12	11	(1600)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	64	23	8	5	(1581)
Participating In Fund Raising	60	28	8	4	(1581)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIVATE SCHOOL 1991

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	33	38	15	14	(102)
Child's Behavior	39	31	16	14	(104)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	28	34	24	15	(101)
Participating In Fund Raising	16	43	30	12	(102)

Question: "During your child's **last year** in school, how many times, not counting report cards, did someone at your **school contact you** about the following?"

Table 10. Choice and MPS Parents Frequency of Contacting Their Schools (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIOR (PUBLIC) SCHOOL, 1990

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	13	27	34	27	(134)
Class Your Child Took	37	29	19	14	(134)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	46	26	15	13	(133)
Participating In Fund Raising	31	45	16	7	(134)
Providing Information For School Records	24	47	15	14	(131)
Child's Behavior	26	25	21	29	(132)
Helping In The Classroom	52	27	15	6	(134)

MPS PARENTS, 1991

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	24	33	25	19	(1596)
Class Your Child Took	45	36	11	7	(1568)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	63	21	7	9	(1579)
Participating In Fund Raising	54	32	9	4	(1577)
Providing Information For School Records	32	45	16	7	(1568)
Child's Behavior	36	32	17	16	(1588)
Helping In The Classroom	68	20	5	7	(1584)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIVATE SCHOOL, 1991

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	20	31	24	26	(105)
Class Your Child Took	34	31	23	12	(103)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	27	34	15	24	(103)
Participating In Fund Raising	14	42	31	13	(102)
Providing Information For School Records	24	49	22	6	(101)
Child's Behavior	24	44	14	17	(104)
Helping In The Classroom	40	38	13	10	(103)

Question: "During your child's **last year** in school, how many times did **you** (or someone in your household) **contact the school** about the following?"

Table 11. Parental Involvement, Choice and MPS Parents (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIOR (PUBLIC) SCHOOL, 1990

	Yes	No	(N)
Attend Parent/Teacher Conference	92	8	(133)
Belong To A Parent/Teacher Organization	22	78	(133)
Attend Meetings Of Parent/Teacher Organization	52	48	(132)
Take Part In Activities Of Parent/Teacher Organization	51	49	(133)
Belong To Other Organizations Dealing With School Matters	22	78	(133)

MPS PARENTS, 1991

	Yes	No	(N)
Attend Parent/Teacher Conference	84	16	(1593)
Belong To A Parent/Teacher Organization	21	79	(1579)
Attend Meetings Of Parent/Teacher Organization	64	36	(1587)
Take Part In Activities Of Parent/Teacher Organization	35	65	(1585)
Belong To Other Organizations Dealing With School Matters	16	84	(1573)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIVATE SCHOOL, 1991

	Yes	No	(N)
Attend Parent/Teacher Conference	98	2	(105)
Belong To A Parent/Teacher Organization	20	80	(104)
Attend Meetings Of Parent/Teacher Organization	74	26	(104)
Take Part In Activities Of Parent/Teacher Organization	63	37	(104)
Belong To Other Organizations Dealing With School Matters	24	76	(104)

Question: "Did you and your spouse/partner do any of the following at your child's public school last year?"

Table 12. Parents Participation In Educational Activities, 1990 (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIOR (PUBLIC) SCHOOL, 1990

	Times/Week				
	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Help With Child's Homework	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Read With Or To Your Child	6	20	42	31	(144)
Work On Arithmetic Or Math	5	24	40	31	(143)
Work On Penmanship Or Writing	9	31	31	29	(144)
Watch Educational Program On T.V. With Your Child	15	40	29	17	(143)
Participate Together In Sports Activities	25	36	26	13	(142)

MPS PARENTS, PUBLIC SCHOOL 1991

	Times/Week				
	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Help With Child's Homework	13	26	24	37	
Read With Or To Your Child	20	26	25	29	(1596)
Work On Arithmetic Or Math	20	30	23	27	(1587)
Work On Penmanship Or Writing	33	29	19	20	(1575)
Watch Educational Program On T.V. With Your Child	23	39	20	18	(1603)
Participate Together In Sports Activities	30	36	17	18	(1577)

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIVATE SCHOOL 1991

	Times/Week				
	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Help With Child's Homework	3	20	32	45	(105)
Read With Or To Your Child	9	29	29	34	(105)
Work On Arithmetic Or Math	6	31	30	34	(104)
Work On Penmanship Or Writing	15	35	27	23	(104)
Watch Educational Program On T.V. With Your Child	15	55	19	11	(104)
Participate Together In Sports Activities	25	48	13	14	(104)

Question: "How many times in a normal week did you participate in the following activities with your child?"

Table 13. Importance of Education Compared To Other Goals (Percentages).

	Education More Important	Education As Important	Education Less Important	(N)
CHOICE FAMILIES, 1990				
Having A Good Job	53	46	1	(149)
Having Enough Money In The Family	41	59	1	(148)
Maintaining Religion/Faith	22	61	17	(148)
Maintaining Family Ethnic Tradition	35	60	5	(148)
Having A Good Place To Live	33	64	3	(148)
MPS FAMILIES, 1991				
Having A Good Job	47	49	2	(1582)
Having Enough Money In The Family	41	54	5	(1560)
Maintaining Religion/Faith	33	54	12	(1553)
Maintaining Family Ethnic Tradition	42	51	7	(1549)
Having A Good Place To Live	34	60	6	(1566)

Question: "How would you rate the importance of education in your family compared to other goals?"

Table 14. Prior Achievement Test Scores (1990), Last Test Only*

	CHOICE STUDENTS		MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	25.8%	35.9%	34.8%	42.8%	27.2%	36.2%
Median National Percentile	30	33	37	42	32	37
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	39.3	41.1	43.4	45.8	40.1	42.3
Standard Deviation NCE	16.2	19.3	18.5	20.3	17.0	19.2
(N Tests)	(171)	(167)	(3231)	(3130)	(2136)	(2117)

* Data includes the last Iowa Test of Basic Skills taken by students through May 1990 in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Statistics based on the latest test in the student's file.

Table 15. Choice School Teacher Characteristics.*

	Wisconsin	Other States	Specialty	None	(N)
Certification	62%	8%	6%	24%	(50)

	Less Than 1 Year**	1	2	3	4	5-9	10 or more	Mean Years	(N)
Seniority	14%	22%	18%	20%	4%	8%	12%	4.2	(50)

	Female	Male	(N)
Gender:	88%	12%	(58)

	African American	Hispanic	White	(N)
Race:	15%	13%	72%	(54)

* Based on interviews and observation. A small number of teachers are missing.

** Began teaching at a school after 9/1/90. For mean year computations seniority = 1 year.

Table 16. Classroom Observations, All Schools (Percentages).

CHILDREN'S INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Children Were					
--listening to teacher	12	35	42	11	0
--watching teacher demonstrate	67	32	2	0	0
--engaged in hands-on work with the teacher	51	39	9	0	2
--engaged in discussion	56	33	9	2	0
--answering questions	25	58	16	2	0
--asking questions	60	39	2	0	0
--engaged in other academic activities	44	33	18	2	4
--engaged in other non academic activities	12	63	18	7	0
--taking a test	88	9	2	2	0
--reading	67	18	14	0	2
--doing seat work	46	26	16	11	2
--oral drill	60	21	18	2	0
--composing written work	75	19	5	0	0
--art or music	75	14	5	2	4

CHILDREN'S SUMMARY ACTIVITY

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Children Were					
--on task	0	11	12	40	37
--being disciplined	14	68	18	0	0

TEACHER'S ACTIVITY

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Teachers Were					
--lecturing, group instruction	14	42	33	9	2
--asking closed questions	30	54	12	4	0
--asking open questions	42	58	0	0	0
--providing feedback	54	39	4	4	0
--engaged in discussion	44	46	5	5	0
--monitoring students' work	14	42	37	5	2
--reviewing students' completed work	60	35	48	2	0
--telling students to stop doing something/ disciplining	16	79	4	2	0

LESSON CONTENT

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Focused on facts	35	37	18	7	4
Focused on skills	12	26	32	25	5
Focused on understanding	25	37	25	11	4
Was comprehended by students	26	7	23	19	25

MATERIALS

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Texts or workbooks	40	21	11	23	5
Other books	84	14	2	0	0
Chalk board	61	26	7	5	0
AV	86	5	5	3	0
Manipulatives	56	32	11	2	0
Other materials	44	28	16	5	7

INSTRUCTIONAL ORGANIZATION

	None of the Time	Less than Half of the Time	Approx. Half of the Time	More than Half of the Time	All period
Whole class	7	11	28	23	32
Groups	51	26	12	5	5
Individual	35	37	21	7	0
Time spent on instruction	26	25	12	18	19

CLASSROOMS

	Dirty	Fairly Dirty	Fairly Clean	Clean
Cleanliness	2	9	28	61

	Chaotic	Somewhat Chaotic	Fairly Orderly	Very Orderly
Physical Order	4	9	41	47
Social Order	12	8	52	29

	Quiet	Fairly Quiet	Fairly Noisy	Noisy
Sound Level	26	36	22	16

Table 17. Choice Grades 7 and 8 and Grades 3 To 6 Student Survey (Percentages)

	7 AND 8 GRADE STUDENTS		3-6 GRADE STUDENTS	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1. My school gives students a good education.	83	10	80	6
2. I trust most of the people at my school.	40	53	39	43
3. Fighting is a problem at my school.	36	39	40	37
4. In my school, teachers expect students to do their best all the time.	94	7	89	8
5. I am satisfied with how I am doing at my school.	48	45	57	34
6. My teachers plan fun activities for us to do.	33	63	63	28
7. Many teachers at my school don't care about students.	3	87	26	61
8. There are places in my school I don't go because I am afraid of other students.	10	90	7	89
9. I like my teachers.	65	19	62	30
10. My teachers are usually fair to me.	81	13	62	32
11. My teachers usually tell me how to correct the mistakes in my work.	83	17	87	11
12. My teachers usually tell us ahead of time what we are going to be learning about in class.	42	39	79	11
13. Students in my school usually do their homework.	48	42	36	40
14. Most of the students pay attention to the teacher.	48	39	45	36
15. My teachers check and return my homework.	87	10	80	15
16. The principle has visited my classroom.	97	0	89	2
17. When I have a problem in class, I can talk to the principal.	45	45	43	36

	7 AND 8 GRADE STUDENTS		3-6 GRADE STUDENTS	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
18. Our principle does a good job of running this school.	55	29	70	17
19. School rules are fair.	39	55	42	49
20. Teachers treat girls the same as boys.	48	45	26	64
21. My school spends too much time teaching reading and math.	42	55	36	51
22. My school spends too much time teaching social studies and science.	26	68	30	61
23. My school spends too much time teaching subjects like music and art.	7	79	15	76
24. If I have a personal problem, there is someone at school that I can talk to.	53	43	61	30
25. My parents expect me to get good grades in school.	97	3	98	2
26. My parents have met and talked with my teachers.	84	16	83	11
27. Teachers in my school put too much pressure on students to get good grades.	42	48	33	56
28. This school provides the type of courses I am most interested in.	29	58	NA	NA
29. This school makes it easy to participate in outside activities like sports and clubs.	26	65	NA	NA
30. Alcohol use is a problem at this school.	3	94	NA	NA
31. Drug use is a problem at this school.	0	97	NA	NA
32. My mom and dad talk to me everyday about school.	52	45	60	34
33. My mom and dad help me often with my schoolwork.	45	52	82	17
	(N=31)		(N=54)	

Question: FOR EACH STATEMENT PLEASE FILL IN ONE CIRCLE TO SHOW IF YOU "AGREE," "DISAGREE" OR "DO NOT KNOW."

Table 18. Achievement Test Scores, 1991.

	CHOICE STUDENTS		ALL MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS*	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	27.6%	27.5%	32.3%	40.0%	24.9%	33.4%
Median National Percentile	34	30	35	40	31	35
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	41.6	39.1	42.0	45.2	38.8	42.0
Standard Deviation NCE	17.0	19.3	17.8	20.0	15.9	18.2
(N Tests)	(188)	(196)	(1967)	(1957)	(1433)	(1419)

* Low-income students qualify for free or reduced-free lunch.

Table 19. Choice Parent Satisfaction With Choice Private School (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, 1991

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	(N)
Textbooks	54	42	2	2	(100)
Location of School	57	34	3	6	(105)
Opportunities For Parent Involvement	62	36	1	1	(103)
Teacher's Performance	67	27	3	3	(104)
Program of Instruction	62	32	4	2	(103)
Principal's Performance	55	36	4	5	(101)
Amount Child Learned	64	28	5	3	(104)
Discipline in the School	52	39	3	6	(105)

Question: "How satisfied were you with the following in last year's school?" (Please circle one number or don't know on each line)

Table 20. Frequent Open-End Responses of Choice Parents Concerning the Choice Program and Choice Schools, 1991 (Percentages)

	WHY CONTINUE IN THE CHOICE PROGRAM?	LIKE ABOUT CHOICE PROGRAM?	DISLIKE ABOUT CHOICE PROGRAM?
Educational Quality of the School	44	46	12
Other Qualities of the Schools	16	22	32
Child Specific Qualities of Choice Schools	31	8	0
Want Private Education, But Cannot Afford It	5	11	0
Tuition, Fund Raising, Bad Experience, Program Not Continuing, Selection Process	0	0	38
(N-Total Responses)	(64)	(145)	(50)

Question: "Why (or why not) do you plan to continue in the private school choice program?"

Key:

Educational Qualities include references to "better educational quality", programs, class size, individual attention, etc.

Other Qualities include references to values, parental involvement, discipline, teachers, etc.

Child Specific Qualities include references to better child performance, better opportunities, need for special attention, etc.

APPENDIX A
ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORE MEASURES

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is a norm-referenced achievement test. All tests are multiple choice, and in most grades are taken by a student reading from a test booklet. In some of the earlier grades, teachers ask the items orally. A number of measures can be derived from the test. All are related and begin with a simple raw score (the number correct on a test or subtest). That score is then transformed in a number of different ways. The most commonly referred to measures are national percentile rankings and grade equivalents. We also rely on normal curve equivalents in this report.

National percentiles refer to the placement of a student on the test relative to a national sample of students. Percentiles range from 1 to 99, with the national median being 50. Because national percentiles are not integer-level measures, they cannot be averaged or subtracted to arrive at gain scores. Some schools use *grade equivalents* as a measure. Grade equivalents do not indicate where a student ranks relative to an a priori standard of what a student should know at a certain grade. They are a relative measure directly analogous to national percentiles. When people refer to being "at grade level" in a subject, that is the equivalent of being at or above the 50th national percentile. It means precisely that the student is at or above where the median student in the national reference group ranked on the test for that grade.

Normal curve equivalents (NCE) are a different transformation that has the advantage of being an integer-level measure. Normal curve equivalents can be manipulated arithmetically. The distribution of NCEs is flatter than national percentiles. What this means is that for national percentiles, many students fall in the middle of distribution, near the median. This makes the measure of the percentage of students at or above the 50th percentile sensitive to slight fluctuations in the number of items answered correctly. Thus schools or districts that may do slightly better or worse on a test on average can show large changes in the percent at or above the median. The national percentile measure is the main measure reported by the Milwaukee Public School System, so we report it along with normal curve equivalents. When large enough samples of students are available in subsequent years, gain scores for individual students will be constructed using normal curve equivalents and will be the most reliable measure of achievement based on test score results.

Table A1. Survey Sample Sizes and Response Rates.

	CHOICE PARENTS, 1990	MPS PARENTS, 1991	CHOICE PARENTS, 1991
Surveys Mailed	360	5473	359
Surveys Returned	160	1623	139
Surveys Not Delivered	31	65	33
Response Rate Based On Delivered Surveys	48.6%	30.0%	42.6%

APPENDIX B

Table B1. Prior Achievement Test Scores (1990), All Tests*

	CHOICE STUDENTS		MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	28.2%	34.2%	36.9%	43.4%	30.8%	37.5%
Median National Percentile	33	34	38	43	38	38
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	41.3	41.8	44.0	46.3	41.4	43.3
Standard Deviation NCE	15.7	18.3	18.0	19.8	16.9	18.6
(N Tests)	(436)	(429)	(8655)	(8582)	(6027)	(5975)

* Data includes all Iowa Tests of Basic Skills taken by students through May, 1990 in the Milwaukee Public School system. Statistics are based on all test records in student's file.

Table B2. Prior Achievement Test Scores (1990), MPS Students, Last Test Only, By Income Level*

	HIGH-INCOME MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	51.6%	57.1%	27.2%	36.2%
Median National Percentile	51	57	32	37
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	50.6	53.3	40.1	42.3
Standard Deviation NCE	19.7	20.5	17.0	19.2
(N Tests)	(977)	(970)	(2136)	(2117)

* Data includes the last Iowa Test of Basic Skills taken by students through May 1990 in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Statistics based on the latest test in the student's file. High-income students do not qualify for free or reduced-free lunch, low-income students do.

Table B3. Prior Achievement Test Scores, (1990), MPS Students, All Tests, By Income Level*

	NON-LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	51.8%	57.6%	30.8%	37.5%
Median National Percentile	51	57	38	38
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	50.5	53.6	41.4	43.3
Standard Deviation NCE	18.9	20.6	16.9	18.6
(N Tests)	(2518)	(2498)	(6027)	(5975)

* Low-income students qualify for free or reduced-free lunch.

Table B4. Achievement Test Scores, 1991, MPS Students, By Income Level*

	NON-LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS		LOW-INCOME MPS STUDENTS	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Percent of Students At Or Above 50th National Percentile	53.2%	58.4%	24.9%	33.4%
Median National Percentile	51.5	60	31	35
Mean Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)	51.0	54.0	38.8	42.0
Standard Deviation NCE	19.9	22.1	15.9	18.2
(N Tests)	(500)	(1419)	(1433)	(1419)

* Non-low-income students do not qualify for free or reduced-free lunch, low-ncome students do.

APPENDIX C

Table C1. Choice and MPS Parent Satisfaction With Schools, 1991, Including Parents of Students No Longer In Choice Schools (Percentages)

CHOICE PARENTS, 1990

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	(N)*
Textbooks	46	38	5	11	(131)
Location of School	49	33	5	13	(137)
Opportunities For Parent Involvement	55	32	5	8	(132)
Teacher's Performance	60	27	4	9	(136)
Program of Instruction	53	30	8	9	(135)
Principal's Performance	48	31	7	14	(133)
Amount Child Learned	56	29	7	9	(135)
Discipline in the School	47	33	5	15	(137)

Question: "How satisfied were you with the following in last year's school?" (Please circle one number or don't know on each line)

Table C2. Choice Parents Frequency of Being Contacted By Their Schools, 1991, Including Parents of Students No Longer In Choice Schools (percentages).

CHOICE PARENTS, PRIOR (PUBLIC) SCHOOL 1990

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	40	34	15	11	(133)
Child's Behavior	39	33	17	11	(136)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	37	31	19	13	(133)
Participating In Fund Raising	20	43	25	12	(134)

Question: "During your child's **last year** in school, how many times, not counting report cards, did someone at your **school contact you about the following?"**

Table C3. Choice and MPS Parents Frequency of Contacting Their Schools, 1991, Including Parents of Students No Longer In Choice Schools (Percentages)

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Child's Academic Performance	19	26	25	30	(136)
Class Your Child Took	29	29	23	19	(133)
Doing Volunteer Work For The School	28	34	13	25	(134)
Participating In Fund Raising	17	39	30	14	(132)
Providing Information For School Records	22	46	22	6	(132)
Child's Behavior	25	37	18	20	(134)
Helping In The Classroom	40	35	12	13	(134)

Question: "During your child's **last year** in school, how many times did **you** (or someone in your household) **contact the school** about the following?"

Table C4. Choice Parents Parental Involvement, 1991, Including Parents of Students No Longer In Choice Schools (Percentages)

	Yes	No	(N)
Attend Parent/Teacher Conference	96	4	(137)
Belong To A Parent/Teacher Organization	27	73	(136)
Attend Meetings Of Parent/Teacher Organization	76	24	(136)
Take Part In Activities Of Parent/Teacher Organization	62	38	(136)
Belong To Other Organizations Dealing With School Matters	26	74	(136)

Question: "Did you and your spouse/partner do any of the following at your child's public school last year?"

Table C5. Parents Participation In Educational Activities, 1991, Including Parents of Students No Longer In Choice Schools (Percentages)

	Times/Week				
	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more	(N)
Help With Child's Homework	3	17	31	48	(137)
Read With Or To Your Child	9	25	29	37	(137)
Work On Arithmetic Or Math	8	26	27	39	(135)
Work On Penmanship Or Writing	16	31	24	30	(135)
Watch Educational Program On T.V. With Your Child	15	46	24	15	(136)
Participate Together In Sports Activities	23	43	15	18	(136)

Question: "How many times in a normal week did you participate in the following activities with your child?"